As the different processes of diasporic formations can be seen in different concentration zones of the world, they have incited diverse response over the ages. Several critics and theoreticians have attempted to theorize diaspora and have found the task baffling. It is all the more puzzling to scholars and readers for the different definitions of diaspora and the set characteristics proposed by those working in diaspora are at once complementary and contradictory. This chapter attempts to chart out the notions of diaspora and the different approaches to the same. An attempt has been made to find the inherent pattern that can be deciphered from the accumulation of numerous responses, as well as to find the contradictions. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section categorically enlists different responses brought in by different diasporic scholars and theoreticians. The second section mostly deals with the ‘home-homelessness’ dichotomy and the politics of the same. The third section looks into the various theories of identity formation and sees how the diasporic subjects adjust their identities in their crucial position. In a nutshell, this chapter attempts to briefly outline diaspora as a theoretical process, the understanding of the lived experience being left for analysis in the forthcoming chapters.

I. Critical Responses to Diaspora

According to Walker Conner, diaspora is “that segment of a people living outside the homeland” (Connor16). The word is etymologically derived from the Greek diasperien, dia= “across” and –sperien = “to sow or scatter seeds” (qtd. Braziel and Mannur 2). In this regard
Virgil Suarez’s comment deserves mention: “We have taken root where exile threw us” (ibid. 2). According to Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, diaspora refers literally to “communities of people dislocated from their native homelands through migration, immigration, or exile as a consequence of colonial expansion” (Brael and Mannur 4). While this definition of diaspora is negative, the etymological meaning of the same is positive. The original notion of the same came up with the forceful exodus of the Jewish community fraught with the “collective” (Robinson 82) trauma of the banishment and exile. Since then several forms of dispersal, from coercive uprooting to voluntary displacement, have taken place at one or the other time in history.

William Safran argues that a diaspora exists once people have been dispersed from a specific original “center” to two or more “peripheral,” or foreign, regions...[and] they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return (Safran 83). Since the inauguration of the journal Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies in 1991, the scope of diaspora studies has enlarged to a great extent and the same has proliferated in the academia. The theoretical, cultural and historical concerns associated with the term are devoted to ethnic, national and trans-national concerns. In his editorial preface to the first issue of Diaspora, Khachig Tölölyan writes, “The term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile-community, overseas community, ethnic community” (Tölölyan 3).

The term diaspora is now used casually for a large number of people, whether exiles, immigrants or even globe-trotters. Also, according to William Safran, the “diaspora
community” seem increasingly to be used as metaphoric designations for several categories of people—expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities…” (Safran 83). However these terms are not always used at random, for the terms have slight variation in meanings. The varied experiences of the diasporic writers categorized as migrants, plural, hybrid, expatriate, immigrant, etc. harbour enough scope for discrimination. Migrants are people who move from one place to another, especially in a different country. An immigrant is a person who comes for one’s permanent residence to a country other than one’s native land. An expatriate is one who is living abroad especially for a long period. Those termed as plural have more than one home, identity, etc. Hybrid is a person who has adopted himself and assimilated the cultural attributes of the host community, while exile is a state of being expelled from one’s native land. An emigrant is one who leaves one’s own country to settle in another and a diasporic is dispersed. However these terms are often used as synonyms by different critics and even misused at times.

Robin Cohen, in his turn makes intricate classification within the diaspora and in Global Diasporas: An Introduction categorizes diaspora into five broad groups:

- **Victim Diasporas**: the forceful eviction of one group by another as seen in the case of Jewish experience, African, Armenians, Palestinians, etc.
- **Trade Diasporas**: a group proactively dispersing to serve more than one market, as Phoenicians, Venetians, Chinese, etc.
- **Labour Diasporas**: travellers travelling voluntarily or under constrictions in search of job opportunities, for example, Indians, Chinese, etc.
- **Imperial Diasporas**: migrating to the colonized country to serve the colonial homeland as Britain, Canada, etc.
• Cultural Diasporas: groups with shared cultural traits which bring communities together in a de-territorialized land and identity as Indians and Caribbeans, etc (qtd. Robinson 84).

Apart from the categorizations given by Cohen, diaspora can even be grouped on the basis of the nature of migration. Some people had been forced to migrate as bonded labourers or as slaves, as a result of persecution or as political refugees. These people comprise the forced or involuntary diaspora. On the other hand, voluntary diaspora comprises people who have migrated in search of better opportunities. Though a basic sense of crisis and existential fragmentation lie at the root of diasporic experience, the case is to a certain extent different with voluntary diasporic subjects, as opposed to forced diasporic subjects. Sudesh Mishra, for example, differentiates between what he calls “sugar” and “masala” diaspora. He makes a distinction between the “semi-voluntary diaspora” of the indentured labourers and the migration of the post-colonial era in search of better opportunities. As Mishra observes:

> There is a distinction to be made between the old and the new diasporas. This distinction is between, on the one hand, the semi-voluntary flight of indentured peasants to the non-metropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam, and Guyana, roughly between the years 1830 and 1917; and on the other the late capital or postmodern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centres such as Australia, the United States, Canada and Britain (Mishra 276).

Again, the diasporic people can be further classified as first generation, second or third generation and the like. This distinction is based on the period of shift, and the number of generations through which the subject had been a citizen of the host land or the present land of stay. In the case of both the post-colonial migrants, and the second-generation or third generation diasporic people, who have been born and brought up in the host country, dislocation and homelessness turn out to be mythical or imaginary construct— a theoretical
concept. The most complex and liberated transnational diasporic group however is the "globetrotter". They move to and fro from one land to another; and homeland for them is nothing but an abstraction. They find themselves in open societies capable of contesting the dialectics of home and identity from a privileged stance. Transnational movements and globetrotting are brought under the compass of diaspora. Nevertheless critics like Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, and Arjun Appadurai put diaspora apart from transnationalism which is an economic and commercial phenomenon. According to Appadurai, while transnationalism is a phenomenon concerning the business and economic transactions operating globally, the concern of diaspora is basically the human movements and the consequent disturbances and rifts in the personalities of the people disrupted as a result of the shift. Businessmen, industrialists, film makers, professionals, scholars all move from place to place for their purpose of work and their encounter, strictly financial, is what makes them transnational. They hardly undergo any crisis.

At present the term diaspora is used to refer to every sort of break, dispersion or dislocation, irrespective of place and territory, even symbolic ones. Diasporic rootlessness is also confused as a trait of modernity or with postmodern angst. According to Balvant Jani, "the word "diaspora" is used to represent the feelings of all those who feel themselves to be cut off politically or existentially." (Jani 48). Moreover the diasporic angst, the sense of homelessness, rootlessness is often seen as a mental crisis and at times exaggerated. This deterritorialisation hardly proves substantial in today’s context of decreased air fares, technology based communicativeness through internet and proximity made possible through cultural festivals and get-togethers organized by the joint venture of the homeland and the resident communities in the new land. Media creates a pseudo-nationalism which binds the people in a strain. This may even give rise to communal feelings when dragged to its extreme
limits. This sense of nationalism at times gives rise to pacts between the expatriates and the activists and the fundamentalists. Unions and agitation groups spread their roots worldwide through connective links between people residing in the homeland and those settled outside the home. The media makes firm the loosened structure and builds an internal coherence among the people settled in the homeland and diaspora. Arjun Appadurai claims in accordance with Benedict Anderson that with “print capitalism” (qtd. Loomba), ‘a new power was unleashed in the world’ while Meyrowitz (1985) quotes, media create communities with “no sense of place” (Appadurai “Disjuncture…” 585).

In recent theorizing of diaspora the cyber technology has laid the track for a cyborg diaspora. Cyberspace has often been colonized by diasporas in communicating with people of the homeland and creating a ground for free interaction. Deprived of a fixed territorial space diasporic people encroach upon the cyberspace in a dire attempt at creating a space more real and even more effective than the territories confined within borders and lines.

Arjun Appadurai makes a unique observation in his conceiving of five different ‘imagined worlds’ or ‘landscapes’ to explain the new nature of present day global economy. As Appadurai further elucidates, “communities are forged transnationally, across nation-states through networks of (a) diaspora (b) migration (c) technology (d) electronic media (e) ideologies (f) global capital” (Braziel, and, Mannur 25).

Modern theories and researches on diaspora have thus brought to the fore that locale is today hardly the benchmark for the nationality of a person. The diasporic people are bound by a strong sense of nationalism which transcends the boundaries of state and territory. In the absence of a particular locale or a space to call their own, the diasporic people are even more
firm in their nationalistic ideals. This is in a way a craving and seeking for an identity. In the urge to get a name, an identity to badge as one’s own, the diasporic people tend to develop broad nationalistic myths or the “‘myths of the nation’…myth as distortion or lie; myth as mythology, legend, or oral tradition; myth as literature per se; myth as shibboleth—all of these meanings are present at different times in the writing of modern political culture” (Brennan 44). This is what Appadurai names, “nationalistic genie…carried in the repertories of increasingly mobile populations…” (Appadurai 1993 798). A nation is not only a state within borders/boundaries, but a local community, a group of people with a shared feeling, family or even a “condition of belonging” (Brennan 45), which the diasporic subjects explore.

While defining this as transnational migration, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Szanton Blanc observe—“Immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement…immigrants construct and reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society.” (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 48). Hence the state of being a diasporic subject is never a “settled issue” (Brah 2). Rather it is such a state which eludes every attempt at attaining any kind of stability. The very notion of diaspora brings to the fore the issue of being at two or more places at once— if not physically, certainly in the mind, that is psychologically and emotionally. One at once has more than one home, more than one country to claim as his home yet no home to call his own. This initial dilemma which lies at the core of diasporic existence hinders a person from even attaining a stable state of mind. At the most the diasporic subjects can aspire for a mean point where the attachment and detachment to both the countries are to a certain extent balanced and supplanted against each other. This is to ensure a steady living amidst disturbances. As James Clifford observes, “Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternate public spheres (1987), forms of
community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national
time/space in order to live inside, with a difference” (Clifford 308).

Coming to assimilation, this forms another important part of diasporic discourse. The process
of assimilation does not work in the same manner with all, nor is the rate of assimilation the
same with every diasporic individual. Milton Gordon (Gordon 71) identifies seven types of
assimilation: (1) cultural or behavioral assimilation—or in other words acculturation; (2)
structural assimilation, which involves the entrance into the organizations and institutions of
the host society at the “primary group level”; (3) marital assimilation—or amalgamation; (4)
identificational assimilation, which means the creation of a shared sense of peoplehood at the
societal level; (5) attitude receptional assimilation, which refers to the absence of prejudice;
(6) behavioral receptional assimilation, which refers to the absence of discrimination; and (7)
civic assimilation, where interethnic conflicts over values and power are overcome by the
shared identity of citizenship. Moreover as Gordon summarized, “Structural assimilation,
then, rather than acculturation, is seen to be the keystone of the arch of assimilation” (Gordon
81). As mentioned earlier, traditional narrative recognizes a characteristic difference in the
rate of assimilation of first generation and second generation diasporic people. Most of the
first generation people long to get back to the places of origin. Though they hold a passport,
claim to be rightful citizens of the land, and cherish the privileges of this new land, they suffer
from a deep sense of nostalgia. On the other hand, the second generation subjects grow much
more akin to their present land of stay and hardly show any longing for their land of origin.
Here it is apt to mention Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, who in their psychologically-focused
research derived discrimination between the diasporic subjects at different ages in that while
in the case of first generation immigrants one out of a sample of 120 opted for British identity,
the percentage rose to 56.7% with the second generation immigrants. The process of
assimilation subtly works, transforming the diasporic characters and giving their existence a new dimension as they proceed in their stages of living in the hostland (Stopes-Roe, and Cochrane).

However this narrative does not always hold good. Several theoreticians have noted and several fiction writers have shown in the characters portrayed in their fiction that some first generation diasporic subjects grow alien to their past land, while some second generation diasporic people grow an overbearing affinity to their land of origin, with the passage of time.

As a first generation diasporic writer and theoretician G. S. Sharat Chandra, experiences:

I was twenty-seven when I left India for good. Since then, I’ve steered a new course in my life…. Though India is always on my mind, there’s no link that connects the sudden stop my life came to there and my new self. I leaped from one life to another; and in between I left nothing but a vacuum. Only imagination and memory, when I need them, act as my bridges. Thus whenever I go back to India, I’m a stranger wandering almost invisibly in familiar neighbourhoods (Sharat Chandra 232).

On the other hand instances where assimilation gets problematic for second generation diasporic subjects occur in the observations of R. Radhakrishnan, another prominent diasporic critic. Radhakrishnan quotes the extracts of a conversation between himself and his son which states the crisis of the second generation Indian in the United States:

I have talked and listened to a number of young, gifted Indian children of the diaspora who, like my son, were born here and are thus “natural” American citizens. I was startled when they told me that they had grown up with a strong sense of being exclusively Indian, and the reason was that they had experienced little during their growing years that held out promise of first-class of American citizenship. Most of them felt they could not escape being marked by virtue of their skin color, their family background, and other ethnic and unassimilated traits. Many of them recited the reality of a double life, the ethnic private life and the “American” public life, with very little mediation between the two…they talked about being the targets of racial slurs and sexist slurs, and they remembered not receiving the total understanding of their parents who did not quite “get it” (Radhakrishnan 122).
Another critic, P.A.S. Ghuman often pronounces the notion of “biculturalism” as he writes of an interview with an expatriate girl, “I try to go Church, I try to fit in. I do my best—I still believe in my religion (Hindu), but I can fit in both religions…You have to; I do. I was raised here” (Ghuman 135).

Thus it is a well-accepted fact that the diasporic people suffer a hyphenated existence. Life is crucial and complicated as they fail to do away with either of the nationality tags. Identity takes a curious shape in the midst of such gaps. But when it comes to taking pride in nationality, national flag, emblem, etc. he finds himself nowhere. Britain for most South-Asians is an emblem of torture, degradation, dependence and ruin, ensuing from the colonial resistance. Government policies, the response of the natives, societal discrepancy, the abuse of skin colour, all have often confirmed the difference. Moreover racial hatred gives another form to diasporic experience. It can be said that the group formation which is a unique phenomenon of diasporic life follows from the exclusivist stance of the British governments (and almost every other First World country accommodating Third World citizens), in the name of ideological clash, economic problem and upholding the sanctity of the home-culture. The exclusivist notion taken up by these governments, for example the British Government, in relation to the Blacks (the Africans, Afro-Caribbeans and South Asians in general) traces back its origin to 1953 when a number of governmental and voluntary organizations produced a social statistics about the black segment of the new migrant communities in Britain. This was in response to a diktat being issued by a covert ministerial committee. To put it in the words of Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi who look into the changing attitude of the host country, UK to the non-white immigrants:

Early in 1953 a confidential meeting of ministers took place at the Colonial Office. The case for legislative control, it was stressed, needed empirical demonstration. This meant gathering information about unemployment and
National Assistance, ‘numbers’, housing, health, criminality and miscegenation which it was hoped would confirm that black immigrants posed insoluble problems of social, economic and political assimilation…This report formed a central part of cabinet discussion in 1954-5 concerning the need to control black immigration and was to be regularly updated throughout the 1950s (Carter, Harris, and Joshi 58-9).

Through these devices racism gained legitimacy, something like a sponsoring by the State. Speaking of the Blacks in Britain, Peter Fryer in *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, mentions how, “[s]tep by step racism was institutionalized, legitimized and nationalized” (Fryer 381). In 1925 the Conservative Home Secretary, William Joynson-Hicks had announced to a Jewish delegation that “the entry of aliens to this country was not a right, it was a privilege” (Kushner 65). The contemporary Asian version of the refugee experience in Britain is reflected in various works of the diasporic poets, novelists and other creative artists. Satyendra Srivastave (b. 1935, India/ UK) in his “The Resolve” gives a vivid picture of racism in Britain:

Chanting Rule Britannia
And Pakis go home
I see them polishing their helmets
Oiling their bikes
Dusting their gloves
Sharpening their knives
Demonstrating their kicks on a piece of brick
While looking at me (qtd. Patke15).

For these reasons and several others which would be dealt with later, diaspora is thought to be in a subordinate relationship to the nation (hostland). The diasporic people are at times considered much inferior and at a lower position than the natives. They are looked down upon, as Gayatri Gopinath claims, as “the bastard child of the nation— disavowed, inauthentic, illegitimate, and impoverished imitation of the originary culture” (qtd. Braziel, and Mannur 8).
The diasporic people have a similar denigrating status when taken in context of their homeland as well. Rushdie had mentioned that the diasporic people were originally thought to be those who have transgressed their limits and crossed their bounds bringing disgrace upon them. The Hindus were thought to have crossed the *kalapani* and were never assimilated into the home country on return. The Muslims too were condemned as corrupted by the evil influence of wine and pork (Rushdie15). They had brought ill-fate upon them and were considered as having brought shame upon the community. Even in the homeland the diasporic subjects face segregation. Mohan Ramanan an Indian academic comments on diasporic Indian writers thus: “I do not want to sound judgemental but this is the plain fact that Home for these people is Abroad and that is that” (Ramanan 40). The phrase “these people” is certainly derogatory for it sounds attributing second class status to the diasporic people. They are looked down upon and at times bitterly criticized as “the new Orientalists… filtering the brute reality of India (homeland) through NRI glasses” (Ramanan 39).

However the negative response of the people of the homeland is not true in every case. A sort of admiration has also come to be attached with the diasporic people. Studying abroad with aims of settling there permanently is a big craze with the middle-class moneyed groups. With the advent of globalization economic flow between the home and foreign country increased all the more. The signing of intercontinental trade agreements as NAFTA and GATT has opened the scope for transnational interaction and opened avenues for migrant people to communicate with their homeland. International trade relations have opened greater job opportunities for a wide range of people, making emigration profitable. The diasporic people play a major role in mobilizing capital. Though they were thought to be the downcasts in earlier days, they are now thought to be the elites, the respectable dignitaries, those who add
to the funds of the nation states. They play a vital role in influencing the economy of the home state; and thus play a role in promoting transnationalism as well. They send money in huge amounts to help their family back in the home country and even contribute to the building of religious places of worship— temples, mosques, gurudwaras, etc. They even contribute to building clubs, schools, and community halls for the people of the nation or community to flourish. Their contribution to party funds influences political parties and government at times in formulating laws and strategies convenient to them. This improves the status of the diasporic people making their returning very much acceptable.

The diasporic people thus bear concern for both the hostland and homeland and often run the risk of being attacked by both the lands. However though the state of being in a diaspora is a state which lacks a sense of rivetedness to one particular nature, culture or state, some people celebrate their lack of any fixity and stagnancy. They enjoy a sense of ‘global belonging in multiple national spheres,’ finds Sandhya Shukla, the critic dealing widely with the diasporic settlers in Britain and US (Shukla 2). Another category of people who are literally homeless are those who belong to several terrorist groups and social activists as LTTEs, PLO, ISI, Naxals et al who do not continue in a fixed land and perform their operations from several states and nations. However they are mainly recognized as globetrotters and the tag diasporic is often taken to be a misnomer in their case.

II. The Constructs of ‘Home’ vs. ‘Homelessness’

According to William Safran, theorizing diaspora has several aspects and multiple “valences” as ideological, social, cultural, national, transnational, etc. Diaspora is a theoretical space, at times more real and practical than the places acquired by the people of the homeland. The
The notion of homeland or what it means to be at home is much felt and defined by diasporic existence and positioning. He enlists six criteria to be applied to ‘expatriate minority communities’ (Safran 83):

1. they or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original “centre” to two or more “peripheral,” or foreign regions.
2. they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history and achievements
3. they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be fully accepted by their host society and, therefore, feel partly alienated and insulated from it.
4. they regard their ancestral homeland as their true ideal place to which they or their descendants would or should eventually return—when conditions are appropriate.
5. they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and
6. they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a scholarship (Safran 83-84).

Sometimes it is quite difficult and nevertheless hazardous for the diasporic communities in countering cultural dichotomies, and adjusting to attitudes and behaviour patterns of the new land. They are expected to be loyal towards their places of origin as well as their present land of residing. At such a situation the diasporic subjects suffer from guilt of disloyalty—seeming a traitor to both the land of origin which they had discarded in search of a better opportunity and a more comfortable life; and the land of stay, whose goodness and
benevolence he accepts, yet fails to return in terms of loyalty and genuine dedication, love, etc. As mentioned earlier, they are also considered disloyal by both the homeland and hostland. Due to this the immigrants mostly remain confined to their dens or ghettos where people of the same community live in a confined environment giving them the impression of something like the homeland. However as these ghettos have become sites of racialist attacks, a group of people who have felt the need to move out of these confined suburbs, have journeyed to new freedom in the cities. Jenny Robinson’s comment aptly delineates the diasporic sensibility as the critic observes, “Diasporas are fragile transnational communities which often have to negotiate harsh new environments and frequently choose to connect with, and seek security from, people identified, in some way, as ‘the same’” (Robinson 79).

Now if the diasporic subjects are not acknowledged by either of the countries resulting in a sense of unbelongingness pervading their existence, it must be recognized that this is not a phenomenon which taints every diasporic individual alike. Class plays a major role in altering the nature of experience. While the uneducated, illiterate downtrodden face the maximum crisis, the upper strata or the higher income groups, that is, the elites do not share the same lot. They are a success story for both the nations. According to Edward Said, the postcolonial intellectual is the type of the modern intellectual, existing simultaneously inside and outside the dominant regime (Said, Culture…). The post-colonial subjects, whose experience matches the diasporic experience, “reinvade and reclaim what imperialism has taken for its own” (ibid 22). However Said also believes of himself a diasporic subject, that as the very type of political intellectual…a resilient and critical humanist in exile,…he was always ‘out of place’ (Said, Out of Place 54). To bring in Gayatri C. Spivak’s experience, these dislocated people whether, named postcolonial or diasporic, are looked at from different perspectives. As she cites her case, she is approached diversely—“Sometimes ‘an anomaly’, sometimes regarded
as a ‘Third World’ man/woman, and thus a convenient marginal or awkward special guest, the eminent but ‘Visiting Professor, sometimes a Bengali middle-class exile, sometimes as a success story in the star system of American academic life” (Selden, et al. 233).

This problem becomes even more acute for those who have settled in more than one land at different points of time. These dual or multiple migrations have been as a result of multiple shifts due to convenience or as a result of forceful eviction. For example diasporic existence had proved much crucial for Indians who had migrated to East Africa in the 19th and early 20th centuries. During Idi Amin’s reign they were pushed out of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania in the 1980s in the name of ethnic cleansing. These people had been forced to further migrate to England and America in their quest for new land and fresh opportunities. This historical event and the forceful exodus from one diasporic space to another prove a unique instance of repeat migration. In case of repeat migration, the immigrants have more than one diasporic space.

The diasporic groups are thus not only a product of the political turmoils and the clashes waging in their homelands which had resulted in their shifts in many cases, but are largely influenced by the upheavals in their land of stay. Their conditions are altered due to historical changes as imperialism, freedom from the same, economic depression or boom, ethnic wars, etc. or socio-political problems as slavery, persecution, in both the homeland and hostland/s.

When South Asians had arrived in England in the wake of industrialization, the immigrants had been a part of this historical process. Similar had been the case with the immigrants who had travelled to America with the boom in the IT industry and those who have been ousted from their jobs as a result of the recent crash in the same. Again, James Clifford further observes that diasporic subjects are, “always entangled in powerful global histories” (Clifford 302). In his editorial Preface to the first issue of Diaspora, Khachig Tölölyan further writes,
“Diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (Tölöyan 1991 4-5).

Now while most critics project the diasporic angst and take these rootless people as exilic, the critic and academician Jasbir Jain, comes up with just the opposite interpretation where she finds expatriation as a state of exile, but finds the diasporic state as profitable. She feels, “Somewhere the journey of expatriation has turned into a diasporic one—from exile, anguish and suffering to one of pride, glorification and entrenchment in national literatures” (Jain 23). She looks into its “multiple strands, its divided loyalties and its usurpation of space…in this age of globalization, dual citizenship and outsourcing” (ibid). She even gives to understand, “The diaspora in its extended meaning would also go on to include those who have no wish to return either physically or through recollection and have erased the past from their lives” (24).

However this theory put forward by Jain is hard to accept though the reality holds good that several diasporic people have never returned to their homeland nor do they cherish enough hopes of returning. This is because one may not wish to get back, but complete erasure of the past seems unreal. Salman Rushdie, who has the fatwa hanging on him, still cherishes the desire for being back in Pakistan, even when it is the land of dread. For some, this passion for homeland remains in dormant form and never seems to cause much stirring until they face racism or a similar crisis. When it comes to third or fourth generation people, it is certain that they have no past related to the homeland and most of them had never been to the same. But still a consciousness of the homeland comes in snatches. The Indo-Fijian poet and critic Sudesh Mishra in his turn accommodates various definitions of diaspora and the diverse stances taken by different critics. As mentioned earlier he categorically defines the “old” and “new” diaspora as the “sugar” and the “masala” diaspora and explains the binary and the different ideas of “home”. According to him,
The movement from Seepersad Naipaul to Meera Syal suggests an important rethinking of the concept of ‘home’ within the diaspora, especially as this occurs against the backdrop of the global shift from the centring or centripetal logic or monopoly capitalism to the decentering or centrifugal logic of transnational capitalism. Whereas for the sugar diaspora ‘home’ signifies an end to itinerant wandering, in putting down the roots, ‘home’ for the masala diaspora is linked to the strategic espousal of rootlessness, to the constant mantling and dismantling of the self in makeshift landscapes (Mishra 294).

III: Identity Woes

The diasporic subjects oscillate between individual and community identity and struggle hard to make their way out of the crises. They aim at a stable identity and fixity which they find hard to attain. Hence they constantly alter their selves and positioning to work out a remedy. While some of the diasporic subjects resort to group identity to make their presence felt and their voices heard, some others discard the same. Though a sense of community gives a sense of security, this alienation, ghettoisation and a sense of otherness develop further when a person sticks to people of his race, religion, language group or people of the same nationality. For a diasporic individual naming a specific identity becomes more crucial than sorting the hazards of diasporic life. The same person is diversely categorized as Indian/Pakistani/etc, Asian, Black, Black-British, brown or even coloured.

To avoid such straitjacketing some diasporic subjects discard their strict adherence to community identity which lies at the core of their otherness, and instead take to several measures whereby they form a unique identity which is immune to attacks. The diasporic creative artists and theoreticians attempt at curing the mental construct, for exile is a state of the mind apart from being a condition of existence. These diasporic people call an end to this dichotomy and create an elevated stance through their interpretations. They change their
places as well, adjusting to newer locales and shifting between suburbs, ghettos, and metropolis. However they mostly seek survival of their individual identity in the congenial atmosphere of the metropolis. These diasporic subjects prefer surviving alone steeped in his individuality rather than as part of communities stamped with the mark of otherness. Instead they form solidarity and attempt at a common man’s bonding which is universal and of all times. They rediscover themselves in art and perceive a new way of life in their identities beyond boundaries.

Salman Rushdie in his famous essay “Imaginary Homelands” describes the process of identity formation beyond boundaries as a boon— “having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained” (Rushdie 17). A similar stance is celebrated in this poem by Simone Weil:

It is necessary not to be ‘myself’, still less to be ‘ourselves’.
The city gives us the feeling of being at home.
We must take the feeling of being at home into exile.
We must be rooted in the absence of place (Weil 34).

Art brings about connectivity among people throughout the globe. All the people of the dispersed community are brought together through art. It knows no boundary and it is through this that all the bounds come to an end. In this all the groups dispersed at various places interact among themselves and share their experiences. It acts as the connecting link in the diasporic experience. Art has a subtle nature through which memory is invoked. Stuart Hall mentions of the reworking of the Black diasporic experience in the photographic work of a visual artist Armet Francis, a Jamaican-born photographer who has lived in Britain since the age of eight. As Hall claims, it is—
… a testimony to the continuing creative power of this conception of identity within the practices of representation. His photographs of the peoples of the Black Triangle, taken in Africa, the Caribbean, and the U.S., and the U.K., attempt to reconstruct in visual terms “the underlying unity of the Black people whom, colonization and slavery distributed across the African diaspora.” His text is an act of imaginary reunification (Hall 212).

These instances at bringing about an “imaginative reunification” could have been possible only through art and media. Similarly the experience of dislocation, dispersion, shift, rootlessness is richly and intricately portrayed in the works of the diasporic writers. This dislocation forms the structure of diasporic literature, and the pathetic in life is elevated to a dignity in art. Sandhya Shukla also focuses upon the importance of literature to Diasporic experience:

...Just as life experiences, imaginative inclinations, and psychic investments lie outside observed geographical boundaries, they are expressed through word and text in a variety of forms. Imaginaries, in social life or fictional narrative, are a central fact of diasporas through time and ... are explored as taking shape not only in anthropology but across other fields of study as well (Shukla 552).

Again, there is a basic sense of opposition between the external and internal tradition in the diasporic experience. In the face of such multistranded existence in more than one society, the diasporic subjects resort to language, as the all encompassive, accommodating force that can harbour the conflicting and constructed identities within the same self. The British writer of Indian descent Sunetra Gupta mentions the development of a new language in the attempt to acquire a creative space for oneself. She states, “Creative writing allows me to develop a language with which to probe the deeper recesses of my being, Writing is, in this sense, as much about discovering a new language to look further into yourself and those around you” (Gupta 289).
The most prominent aspect of diasporic existence is that in the process of migration they carry along their ways of living, their habits, and their activities. If we discard such high-sounding and baffling words as culture, heritage, tradition and so on, we can simply say that the people coming from their homelands bring along their habits, and create a replica of his/her homeland in this new land. What is peculiar about the diasporic people is that they consciously wish to stick to their previous life styles and even while assimilating keeps intact certain set of customs. This gives them a unique minority stance which is at times more powerful than home identity and a forum wherefrom to speak for his community or claim his rights. The diasporic people often commodify such diasporic ideologies as ‘going-back-to-roots’ and ‘invoking-native-culture’ as strategies to attain popular reckon. Braziel and Mannur aptly quotes Jameson (1983) where the latter coins the phrase “politics of nostalgia” and relates “the politics of nostalgia to the post-modern commodity sensibility” (Braziel, and Mannur 28).

To move on to the other side of the diasporic discourse, the diasporic narrative of the people who have mainly immigrated from metropolitan and like cities to the new countries is different from those immigrated from the villages. The prior had already had an initial alienation with the village-oriented Indian sub-continent, for city life is largely influenced by Westernised culture, dress, and fashion and mostly by English language. Thus migrants from the villages and cities of the same country are broadly apart. Hanif Kureishi, the second generation Pakistani diasporic writer narrates his experience as a British school kid, when told in school that South-Asians squatted in deserts and rode on camels, wondered whether his uncles, who were reputed global businessmen did so “in their suits” (Kureishi, My Beautiful… 25). Here lies a gap, between the exotic representations of the Indian sub-continent conjured up in books or via media and the actual conditions.
Colonialism forms another important criterion to be judged where the host land is the prior imperialist and the homeland the colony, as the case of South Asian diaspora in Britain. The interaction had begun at a much earlier time in history. Moreover the missionary schools had built a strong Western sensibility by introducing Western culture and language. Enoch Powell says, “It is ...truly when he looks into the eyes of Asia that the Englishman comes face to face with those who dispute with him the possession of his native land” (Powell 45). Colonialism had brought the people from South-Asian countries to several settler countries as Caribbean Islands, Fiji, Australia, Trinidad, Guyana, Mauritius, Malaysia, Canada, US and other European countries, as indentured labourers. Formerly the South-Asians when arriving in Britain were offered jobs which were refused or certainly not welcomed by the whites. It must be mentioned that the South Asian diasporic people have a love-hate relationship with the British, which is absent in immigrants who settled in the United States, Australia or Fiji. Hence the urge to preserve one’s identity in the face of outside force, namely the colonialists in the case of South Asian British diaspora or Black British diaspora, is mostly absent in case of other diasporic groups. This notion of colonialism affects the consciousness of the colonized subjects. First-hand memory of disgrace and torture, or second-hand stories of the same disturb the psyche and create rift in their personality. There lurks an element of vengeance as well, as the sight of whites in poverty or going hungry and such heterogeneity in British society incites the feeling of satisfaction and revenge. As Karim in Hanif Kureishi’s debut novel The Buddha of Suburbia remarks on his father Haroon and his father’s friend Anwar’s experience:

London, the Old Kent Road, was a freezing shock to both of them…Dad was amazed and heartened by the sight of the British in England, though. He’d never seen the English in poverty, as roadsweepers, dustmen, shopkeepers and barmen. He’d never seen an Englishman stuffing bread into his mouth with his fingers… (24).
Summing up the basic tenets of diaspora theory as well as fictional manifestations of the same we notice that the reaction to the diaspora has changed over the years. The change is conspicuous from diverse points of view: (i) diaspora has now become the scope for the flow of economy to and fro from the nation, thereby leading to the flourishing of the individual and that of the homeland, (ii) the diasporic people enjoy a higher status for their contribution to the homeland, (iii) they enjoy the elevated status of the spokesperson, wherefrom to comment on the hostland, homeland and diaspora, (iv) they are reinvading the territory that had deprived them, and most importantly (v) for them going back is more difficult than staying over. What had begun as a crisis or human and emotional concern has shifted this day to other aspects as economical and global flow of trade and commerce. On the other hand the heightened position of the diasporics gives them an altar to comment on the governance and culture of both the governments and lands. According to Gurharpal Singh, “Cultural flows in real time have led to sophisticated niche consumerism with a heightened sense of consciousness of Indianess fostered by growing transnational networks and deliberate efforts to construct overarching identities” (qtd. Parekh, Singh and Vertovec 5).

The diasporic texts attempt at representation of both the homeland and hostland through which identification of the author with both the countries is made possible. Avtar Brah writes of the South Asian immigrants,

...having grown up in Britain, they articulate a home-grown British political discourse. They lay claim to the localities in which they live as their ‘home.’ And however much they may be constructed as ‘outsiders,’ they contest these psychological and geographical spaces from the position of ‘insiders.’ Even when they describe themselves as ‘Asian,’ this is not a reaching back to some ‘primordial Asian’ identity. What they are speaking of is a modality of ‘British Asian-ness’ (Brah 47).
Shyam Selvadurai, a Canadian-Sri Lankan writer, in his introduction to the anthology titled *Story-Wallah* outrightly hails diasporic identity as charged with immense possibilities:

> For the majority of people, a dual identity is a burden forced on them by the fact that their bodies, or their skins to be precise, do not represent the nation-state they are in, thus compelling them to constantly wear their difference on their sleeve and carry it around on their back. In my day-to-day interactions with the world outside, I share the irritation, the burden, the occasional danger of this visible otherness. But when I close the door to my study and sit at my computer, that biculturalism becomes the site of great excitement, of great marvel, the very source of my creativity. It is from this space in-between, represented by the hyphen, that I have written what I consider Canadian novels set exclusively in Sri Lanka (Selvadurai 2).

Speaking of the liberty he mentions that he had achieved to write on issues he would not be able to write if he had lived in his home country. Selvadurai further states:

> Homosexuality is illegal in Sri Lanka and the very real threat of physical violence and intimidation might have stopped me from exploring this theme had I lived there (being not of a particularly brave disposition). My thoughts and attitudes, indeed my craft as a writer, have been shaped by my life here in Canada. It is from the clash of these cultures, which occurs in the space between, that the conflicts in my plot lines arise.

> ... Not to write from the space in-between would diminish me (Selvadurai 2).

Diasporic life and in turn diasporic work is informed by a psychological dislocation other than physical displacement, but the diasporic subjects even exploit their identity at circumstances.

A diasporic person is at once attached to and sundered from various psycho-territories.

Regarding “transnationality” it now brings in several responses. Aihwa Ong writes:

> Trans denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to transversal, the transactional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary behaviour and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of state and capitalism (Ong 4).

Identity creates and recreates itself through numerous positioning.
Having studied the various processes of diasporic formations over the different locations of the world in the previous chapter, this chapter attempted to trace the various ways of looking at diaspora. Diaspora is perceived widely as ruptures caused by shifts, political exiles, state of economic turbulence or a fabricated disruption emphasized by the diasporic themselves for reasons that favour their secured living. The chapter has mainly enlisted the different approaches that critics have attached to diasporas and how these aspects can be looked into, as processes, disturbances, crises or calculations. The next four chapters would deal with the fictional representations of the human experiences of different South Asian groups in the British diaspora. For this purpose the next chapter will look into the fiction of two authors of Indian origin, namely Meera Syal and Sunetra Gupta and the following chapters will assess the representation by diasporic authors of Pakistani, Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi descent.
Works Cited


